



Colorado's Race to the Top

Summary of Proposal Draft

Dated: December 11, 2009

What is Race to the Top?

Race to the Top is a competitive grant program that allows states to compete for \$4 billion to invest in education reform over a four year period. The purpose of Race to the Top is to encourage states to invest in comprehensive education reform that increases student achievement and closes gaps in achievement among groups of students. The key reform areas targeted by Race to the Top are the same as those targeted by other education funding available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA):

- Great teachers and leaders
- High-quality standards and assessments
- Turning around the lowest-performing schools
- Using data to improve instruction

Who decides what is in our Race to the Top application?

The application must be signed by Governor Bill Ritter, Commissioner of Education, Dwight Jones, and Chair of the State Board of Education, Bob Schaffer. Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien, together with the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education, has facilitated a series of statewide conversations on our state's priorities for this competition. The state has also collected other good ideas, both from local efforts and from national experts and organizations. The state has started to identify some recurring themes and potential projects, and is working with consultants to understand the costs involved with various choices.

Ultimately, it will be the Governor's decision as to what elements will be included in the application, and the application will also be signed by the state Commissioner of Education and the chairman of the State Board of Education.

What is Colorado's application likely to look like?

Colorado intends to build on the strength of our tradition of local control as well as our history of education reform efforts. A prominent theme in the application will be building and collecting knowledge about what works in improving student outcomes, and sharing it with each other. We know that there are many high-quality district reform efforts underway, and the intent is to use Race to the Top funds to accelerate these reforms and invest in state and district infrastructure to support the reforms.

At this point, the Race to the Top plan has three major statewide components to support, integrate, learn from, and build upon the excellent work being done in Colorado's schools and districts:

- Building out the state's **SchoolView** knowledge management platform so that it provides timely and relevant information to a variety of users: educators, parents, researchers, and policy makers
- A **Center for Educator Excellence** that coordinates state and district efforts to improve and reward teacher and school leader effectiveness. Its role is to provide new information, knowledge and capacity to support educators and will not have rule-making authority.
- A portfolio of efforts aimed at bolstering the turnaround of **Low-Performing Schools**, including a center which will serve as a resource for districts and schools in implementing turnaround efforts in their lowest-performing schools.

Each of these components will be designed in such a way as to meet the needs of all of Colorado's districts. We want to ensure that educators in both small and large districts have the tools they need to prepare students for the 21st Century.

The SchoolView Performance Platform will support educators in their implementation of the revised standards and assessments under CAP4K (the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids which aligns our expectations for students from pre-school through entry to the workforce or post-secondary education), and will support continuous improvement of instruction and practice at the classroom, team, school, district and state level. This platform is designed to allow districts to select from a wide variety of resources they can use to develop and implement curricula and assessments at the district level. In this way we can build on the excellent work already underway, encourage educators to contribute to best practices statewide, and allow districts the option of not having to "reinvent the wheel."

With respect to transitioning to new standards and assessments, this project will provide:

- Searchable databases of standards, state- and district-created aligned instructional materials, and state- and district-created assessments
- Aligned formative and benchmark assessments for voluntary use
- District-developed and validated tools (e.g. pacing and curriculum guides) to support the implementation of aligned curricula that districts can choose to use reducing the redundant development of these tools in each district
- On-line professional development tools, such as videos of model lessons
- Access to and networks of STEM instructional supports
- Intensive professional development to implement the revised standards and improve the use of instructors formative and benchmark assessments by educators

With respect to implementation of a longitudinal data system, this project will provide:

- Incentives for districts to purchase and implement a Student Information System (SIS) that can interface with the statewide system (with a focus on districts that currently do not have SIS)
- The ability for educators to manage real-time information on student progress
- Intensive professional development to support data-driven decision-making

The Center for Educator Excellence is not a new state agency, but instead is likely to be a public-private partnership that will provide leadership, information, and knowledge on supporting educator effectiveness throughout Colorado. Its main supports to Colorado districts will include:

- Providing technical assistance for the development of valid and reliable annual performance evaluation systems
- Providing technical assistance for the development of continuous improvement systems that include the use annual performance evaluations to inform professional development, compensation, staffing and retention
- Facilitating communication with preparation programs teacher and principal preparation needs and supports for new teachers and principals.
- Providing targeted support around recruiting, preparing and supporting teachers in shortage subjects and hard to staff schools
- Piloting career ladder programs for teachers

The Center on Low Performing Schools is intended to build Colorado’s human capital and knowledge around how to turn around low performing schools. This project will provide:

- Incentives to districts to assist with turning around low-performing schools
- A “one-stop-shop” of resources for educators in low-performing schools
- A residential leadership academy to build school leaders educators skilled and knowledgeable about working in and turning-around low-performing schools
- Intensification and improvement of the use of school support team reviews
- Increased support for early childhood programs (CPP) in low-performing school catchment areas

What does a district have to do to implement the State’s plan?

Much of the district’s responsibilities will be connected to implementing reforms already launched, such as the transition to new standards and assessments under CAP4K and the implementation of the new education accountability bill (SB 163). At the same time districts will be asked to commit to participate in Colorado’s R2T plan in areas that go beyond current expectations included in SB 163 or CAP4K. These commitments will include:

1. Developing and implementing a valid and reliable annual evaluation system for teacher and principals that is used to inform decisions that include professional development, compensation, staffing and retention. Under Race to the Top requirements, evaluations must be based in significant part on multiple measures of student growth.
2. Implementing longitudinal data systems with standardized information on students, educators and programs for input into *SchoolView*. Districts can use their own systems or work with the state to develop a common system.
3. Implement one of the four turnaround models in schools identified as chronically low performing. These models are consistent with the district’s obligations under federal School Improvement Grants.
4. Work with the CEEC to monitor the equitable distribution of teachers and address inequities.
5. Work with educator preparation programs to develop processes to better align needed skills in schools, preparation and support for new educators.
6. If Colorado is awarded a Race to the Top grant, the state and the participating districts will then discuss a more detailed scope of work that will state how the work is going to be accomplished in the district and how the state is going to support the district work. Compliance with the plan and district level execution will be monitored and evaluated throughout the grant period.

What’s Missing?

There a number of aspects of the state plan that are still being discussed and may ultimately be included in the final proposal, including:

- Response to Intervention
- Reward and incentive school success
- Focused early childhood education efforts
- Targeted STEM initiatives
- Targeted rural education initiatives
- Charter school authorizer quality
- Support to replicate effective schools
- Targeted efforts to increase high school graduation rates
- Targeted efforts to support closing the achievement gap